Wire and plaster

figure sculpture

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Goals:

1. Students will create an abstract sculpture of a figure in motion that emphasizes the gesture of a human form in action.
2. Students will demonstrate understanding of the balancing of a human in motion and the importance of the location of the center of gravity.
3. Students will understand the motivations and inspirations of the artist Alberto Giacometti.
4. Build a sculpture using a wire armature and plaster dipped cloth to imitate the technique of Giacometti.
5. Understand the relationship of surface treatment and form.
6. Create a form that uses negative space as an integral part of the overall three-dimensional form.

National Standards: 1.A, 1.B, 2.B, 2.C, 4.A, 5.B, 6.B
Illinois State Standards: 25.A.5, 26.A.5, 26.B.4d, 27.B.4b, 27.B.5

Vocabulary: center of gravity**,** armature**,** plaster**,** gesture**,** texture

Materials:
aprox. 3'per student of malleable wire (aluminum sculpting wire),needle nose pliers, wire cutters, tape, plaster(plaster of Paris), old thin cotton fabric torn in strips about 1" wide and about 6" long, newspaper or other table covering, dust masks, disposable gloves, goggles, small plastic buckets, water, newsprint paper, pencils or vine charcoal, hammers, fencing nails or heavy duty staplers, paint

Procedure:
Discussion:
Define ***gesture*** as movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude or the use of motions of the limbs or body as a means of expression.
Define ***positive*** and ***negative space*** and look at how they are important in depicting the figure.
Read prepared handout and/or Scholastic Art article about Alberto Giacometti (Dec. 2007-Jan. 2008). Discuss how the artist developed his primary style and philosophy related to his art.
Look at examples of Giacometti's work, as well as the work of other abstract artist.
How does abstraction contribute to the artist's ability to express an idea?
What are the ideas, moods and movements suggested in these works?
What do the works of these artists suggest to you?
How do *positive* and *negative space* work in the figure and the whole composition?
Look at photos or artwork of individuals in motion, sports are a good subject for imagery.
What is the gesture represented? (figure leaning, foot stepping, etc.)

How would Giacometti portray those figures?
How might he enhance the mood or idea with his technique or composition? Look at his examples and discuss the settings for the figures.

Discuss the process used by Giacometti to build his sculpture. Define ***armature*** as the base structure or "bones" of the sculpture that hold it up. Look at the steps he used from sketch to finished sculpture.

Project steps:
Warm up exercises: Review the terms *gesture* and *positive* and *negative* space. On newsprint paper sheets or in sketchbooks have students do many gesture drawings of figures in motion, using each other as models. The poses should be approximately 2 minutes long and capture the essence of the motion and proportion.

***Drawing*:**
1. Discuss different activities and sports that involve movement. Have students draw four thumbnails of different poses of figures doing those activities. Draw the figures using the gesture drawing style or a very linear style. They do not need to include any props, though they can if they would like to or if they will be included in the final composition. Also include any pedestal or environment that the figure will be in.

2. Students should choose the drawing they like the best and draw the pose from four viewpoints, front, back and both sides.

***Sculpture Construction*:**
3. To build the armature, have students construct the armature with you using the following procedure.
- Use malleable but strong wire and cut a length with wire cutters that is a full arm span.

Caution: The cut ends of the wire are very sharp so wrap them with tape and be careful in handling the length of wire while you are forming it.

- Bend the wire in half and form a small loop, twisting the wire right below the loop.
- With each half bend the wire out, then back to form a tight loop that uses approximately ¼ of the wire. Twist this to secure it.
- Bring the wire ends together and twist to form the torso, splitting the wire where the waist would transition into the hips.
- Using the remainder of the wire form the hips and legs, doubling the wire over for strength.
- Pose the figure in your chosen pose. Be sure to bend the figure at the correct joints and express the mood or motion dramatically with the figure.
- Staple/nail the figure to a base of wood, Styrofoam, or other medium that is strong enough to hold up the armature.

4. Have students tear cotton cloth into thin(1") strips and cut the strips into shorter segments of about 6 to12 inches. Small groups can share the strips. They will need about 5 to 10 strips each, depending on length.

5. Cover the work space and get safety equipment (mask and gloves, some students may need goggles as well). Mix plaster according to the directions. Mix small batches and share with others. The plaster will set up very quickly!!

6. Dip the strips into the plaster and wipe off some of the excess, but leave a good coating on the fabric. Wrap the plaster strips around the wire, starting at the bottom. Leave the texture uneven. You may need to allow the bottom portion of the plaster to set up before moving on to the mid section or the sculpture will sag.

7. If you need to add more plaster strips after the plaster has dried, wet the section down by spraying or dripping water on the area. New plaster will not cure correctly if applied to a dry, highly absorbent surface.

8. When the plaster has hardened and dried, it can be painted with acrylic paint or any other type of paint(tempra and watercolor will need a sealer).

Safety Cautions:
Plaster is a toxic material that can cause several different types of problems with student health when handled improperly so proper safety equipment must be used.

1. It is hazardous to breathe plaster dust because it will bond with water molecules in the lungs.
2. The liquid plaster can be caustic to the skin.
3. Plaster goes through an exothermic reaction and can give off considerable heat.

When purchasing plaster, be sure to get a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet.

Cross-Curriculum content:
Literature – writers of the early 20th century, Existentialism, Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard
World History – Industrialism, Depression Era, WWI and II
Science – Exothermic chemistry